

ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS little piece was written by Mr. STERNE in the year 1759, but for private reasons was then suppressed. The recovery of this satirical performance from oblivion, as worthy of so masterly a pen, will, it is hoped, be a sufficient excuse with all lovers of literary merit, for thus bringing it to public view.

Late Parson,	Abp. H-RR-G
Parson of the Parish,	Abp. H-TT-N
John the Clerk,	Dean of York. FOUNT-N
Trim,	Dr. T-PH-M
Mark Slender,	Dr. BRAITH-T
Lorry Slim,	LAWRENCE ST-NE
William Doe,	Mr. BIRDM-E

Village, York.

Author, Mr LAWRENCE ST-NE.

POLITICAL ROMANCE.

SIR,

IN my last, for want of something better to write about, I told you what a world of fending and proving we have had of late, in this little village of ours, about an old cast pair of black plush-breeches, which *John* our parish clerk, about ten years ago, it seems, had made a promise of to one *Trim*, who is our sexton and dog-whipper.—To this you write me word, that you have had more than either one or two occasions to know a good deal of the shifty behaviour of the said master *Trim*—and that you are astonished, nor can you for your soul conceive, how so worthless a fellow, and so worthless a thing into the bargain, could become the occasion of so much racket as I have represented.—

Now, though you do not say expressly you could wish to hear any more about it, yet I see plainly enough I have raised your curiosity; and therefore, from the same motive that I slightly mentioned it at all in my last letter, I will in this give you a full and very circumstantial account of the whole affair.

But, before I begin, I must first set you right in one very material point, in which I have misled you, as to the true cause of all this uproar amongst us—which does not take its rise, as I then told you, from the affair of the breeches; but, on the

contrary, the whole affair of the breeches has taken its rise from it.—To understand which, you must know, that the first beginning of the squabble was not betwixt *John* the parish-clerk and *Trim* the sexton, but betwixt the parson of the parish and the said master *Trim*, about an old *watch-coat* that had hung up many years in the church, which *Trim* had set his heart upon; and nothing would serve *Trim* but he must take it home, in order to have it converted into a *warm under-petticoat* for his wife, and a *jerkin* for himself against winter; which, in a plaintive tone, he most humbly begged his reverence would consent to

I need not tell you, Sir, who have so often felt it, that a principle of strong compassion transports a generous mind sometimes beyond what is strictly right;—the parson was within an ace of being an honourable example of this very crime—for no sooner did the distinct words—*petticoat—poor wife—warm—winter*, strike upon his ear—but his heart warmed—and before *Trim* had well got to the end of his petition (being a gentleman of a frank open temper) he told him he was welcome to it with all his heart and soul.—But, *Trim*, says he, as you see I am but just got down to my living, and am an utter stranger to all parish-matters, knowing nothing about this old watch-coat you beg of me, having never seen it in my life, and therefore cannot be a judge whether 'tis fit for such a purpose, or, if it is, in truth know not whether 'tis mine to bestow upon you or not—you must have a week or ten days patience, till I can make some inquiries about it—and, if I find it is in my power, I tell you again, man, your wife is heartily welcome to an under-petticoat out of it, and you to a jerkin, was the thing as good again as you represent it.

It is necessary to inform you, Sir, in this place, that the parson was earnestly bent to serve *Trim*
in

in this affair, not only from the motive of generosity, which I have justly ascribed to him, but likewise from another motive, and that was by making some sort of recompence for a multitude of small services which *Trim* had occasionally done, and indeed was continually doing (as he was much about the house) when his own man was out of the way. — For all these reasons together, I say, the parson of the parish intended to serve *Trim* in this matter to the utmost of his power. All that was wanting, was previously to inquire if any one had a *claim* to it, or whether, as it had time immemorial hung up in the church, the taking it down might not raise a clamour in the parish. These inquiries were the things that *Trim* dreaded in his heart—he knew very well, that, if the parson should but say one word to the church-wardens about it, there would be an end of the whole affair. For this, and some other reasons not necessary to be told you at present, *Trim* was for allowing no time in this matter—but, on the contrary, doubled his diligence and importunity at the vicarage-house—plagued the whole family to death—pressed his suit morning, noon, and night; and, to shorten my story, teased the poor gentleman, who was but in an ill state of health, almost out of his life about it.

You will not wonder when I tell you, that all this hurry and precipitation, on the side of master *Trim*, produced its natural effect on the side of the parson, and that was a suspicion that all was not right at the bottom...

He was one evening sitting alone in his study, weighing and turning this doubt every way in his mind, and after an hour and a half's serious deliberation upon the affair, and running over *Trim*'s behaviour throughout—he was just saying to himself—*it must be so*—when a sudden rap at the door put an end to his soliloquy, and in a few minutes to his doubts too; for a labourer in the town, who deemed himself past his fifty-second year, had been

returned by the constables in the militia-list—and he had come with a groat in his hand to search the parish-register for his age. The parson bid the poor fellow put the groat into his pocket, and go into the kitchen—then shutting the study-door, and taking down the parish-register—*who knows*, says he, *but I may find something here about this self-same watch-coat?* He had scarce unclasped the book, in saying this, when he popped on the very thing he wanted, fairly wrote in the first page, pasted to the inside of one of the covers, whereon was a memorandum about the very thing in question, in these express words — *Memorandum.*

“ The great watch-coat was purchased and given,
 “ above two hundred years ago, by the lord of the
 “ manor, to this parish-church, to the sole use and
 “ behoof of the poor sextons thereof, and their
 “ successors for ever, to be worn by them respec-
 “ tively in winterly cold nights in ringing com-
 “ plines, passing-bells, &c. which the said lord of
 “ the manor had done in piety to keep the poor
 “ wretches warm, and for the good of his own
 “ soul, for which they were directed to pray, &c.”
Just heaven! said the parson to himself, looking upwards, *what an escape have I had! give this for an under-petticoat to Trim's wife! I would not have consented to such a desecration to be Primate of all England—nay, I would not have disturbed a single button of it for all my tithes.*

Scarce were the words out of his mouth, when in pops *Trim* with the whole subject of the exclamation under both his arms—I say, under both his arms—for he had actually got it ript and cut out ready, his own jerkin under one arm, and the petticoat under the other, in order to carry to the tailor to be made up, and had just stepped in, in high spirits, to show the parson how cleverly it had held out.

There are now many good families subsisting in the world, but which I have neither time to recollect or look for, which would give you a strong conception

conception of the astonishment and honest indignation which this unexpected stroke of *Trim's* impudence impressed upon the parson's looks—let it suffice to say, that it exceeded all fair description—as well as all power of proper resentment—except this, that *Trim* was ordered, in a stern voice, to lay the bundles down upon the table—to go about his business, and wait upon him, at his peril, the next morning at eleven precisely.—Against this hour, like a wise man, the parson had sent to desire *John* the parish-clerk, who bore an exceeding good character as a man of truth, and who, having moreover a pretty freehold of about eighteen pounds a-year in the township, was a leading man in it; and, upon the whole, was such a one, of whom it might be said, that he rather did honour to his office, than that his office did honour to him—him he sends for, with the church-wardens, and one of the sidersmen, a grave, knowing, old man, to be present—for, as *Trim* had with-held the whole truth from the parson, touching the watch-coat, he thought it probable he would as certainly do the same thing to others. Though this, I said, was wise, the trouble of the precaution might have been spared—because the parson's character was unblemished—and he had ever been held by the world in the estimation of a man of honour and integrity.—*Trim's* character, on the contrary, was as well known, if not in the world, at least in all the parish, to be that of a little, dirty, pimping, pettifogging, ambidextrous fellow—who neither cared what he did or said of any, provided he could get a penny by it. This might, I said, have made any precaution needless—but you must know, as the parson had in a manner but just got down to his living, he dreaded the consequences of the least ill impression on his first entrance among his parishioners, which would have disabled him from doing them the good he wished—so that out of regard to his flock, more than the necessary care due to himself—he was resolved not to lie at the mercy of what resentment might vent, or malice lend an ear to. —

Accordingly

Accordingly the whole matter was rehearsed, from first to last, by the parson, in the manner I've told you, in the hearing of *John* the parish clerk, and in the presence of *Trim*.

Trim had little to say for himself, except "that the parson had absolutely promised to befriend him and his wife in the affair to the utmost of his power; that the watch-coat was certainly in his power, and that he might still give it him if he pleased."

To this the parson's reply was short, but strong, "That nothing was in his *power* to do but what he could do *honestly*—that, in giving the coat to him and his wife, he should do a manifest wrong to the *next* sexton, the great watch-coat being the most comfortable part of the place—that he should moreover injure the right of his own successor, who would be just so much a worse patron as the worth of the coat amounted to; and, in a word, he declared, that his whole intent in promising that coat was charity to *Trim*, but *wrong* to no man—that was a reserve, he said, made in all cases of this kind: and he declared solemnly, *in verbo sacerdotis*, that this was his meaning, and was so understood by *Trim* himself."

With the weight of this truth, and the great good sense and strong reason which accompanied all the parson said on the subject—poor *Trim* was driven to his last shift—and begged he might be suffered to plead his right and title to the watch-coat, if not by *promise*, at least by *servitude*—it was well known how much he was intitled to it upon these scores: "that he had black'd the parson's shoes without count, and greased his boots above fifty times—that he had run for eggs in the town upon all occasions—whetted the knives at all hours—caught his horse, and rubbed him down—that for his wife, she had been ready upon all occasions to char for them; and neither he nor she, to the best of his remembrance, ever took a far-thing

thing, or any thing beyond a mug of ale."—To this account of his services, he begged leave to add those of his wishes, which, he said, had been equally great—he affirmed, and was ready, he said, to make it appear, by a number of witnesses, " he had drank his reverence's health a thousand times (by the-by he did not add, out of the parson's own ale)—that he had not only drank his health, but wished it, and never came to the house but asked his man kindly how he did—that in particular, about half a year ago, when his reverence cut his finger in paring an apple, he went half a mile to ask a cunning woman what was good to staunch blood, and actually returned with a cobweb in his breeches-pocket. Nay, says *Trim*, it was not a fortnight ago, when your reverence took that strong purge, that I went to the far end of the whole town to borrow you a closetstool—and came back, as the neighbours who flouted me will all bear witness, with the pan upon my head, and never thought it too much." *Trim* concluded this pathetic remonstrance, with saying, " He hoped his reverence's heart would not suffer him to requite so many faithful services by so unkind a return :—that if it was so, as he was the first, so he hoped he should be the last example of a man of his condition so treated."—This plan of *Trim*'s defence, which *Trim* had put himself upon, could admit of no other reply than a general smile.—Upon the whole, let me inform you, that all that could be said *pro* and *con*, on both sides, being fairly heard, it was plain that *Trim*, in every part of this affair, had behaved very ill—and one thing, which was never expected to be known of him, happened in the course of this debate to come out against him, namely, that he had gone and told the parson, before he had ever set foot in his parish, that *John* his parish-clerk—his church-wardens, and some of the heads of the parish, were a parcel of scoundrels.—Upon the upshot, *Trim* was kick'd out of doors, and told at his peril never to come there again. »

At

At first, *Trim* huff'd and bounced most terribly—swore he would get a warrant—that nothing would serve him but he would call a bye-law, and tell the whole parish how the parson had misused him; but cooling of that, as fearing the parson might possibly bind him over to his good behaviour, and, for aught he knew, might send him to the house of correction, he lets the parson alone, and to revenge himself, falls foul upon the clerk, who had no more to do in the quarrel than you or I—rips up the promise of the old—cast—pair of black—plush—breeches; and raises an uproar in the town about it, notwithstanding it had slept ten years—but all this, you must know, is looked upon in no other light but as an artful stroke of generalship in *Trim* to raise a dust, and cover himself under the disgraceful chastisement he has undergone.——

If your curiosity is not yet satisfied—I will now proceed to relate the *battle of the breeches* in the same exact manner I have done that of the watch-coat.——

Be it known then, that about ten years ago, when *John* was appointed parish-clerk of this church, this said *Trim* took no small pains to get into *John*'s good graces, in order, as it afterwards appeared, to coax a promise out of him of a pair of breeches, which *John* had then by him, of black plush, not much the worse for wearing—*Trim* only begg'd, for God's sake, to have them bestowed upon him when *John* should think fit to cast them.——

Trim was one of these kind of men who loved a bit of finery in his heart, and would rather have a tatter'd rag of a better body's, than the best plain whole thing his wife could spin him.

John, who was naturally unsuspicious, made no
more

more difficulty of promising the breeches than the parson had done in promising the great coat; and indeed with something less reserve—because the breeches were *John's own*, and he could give them, without wrong, to whom he thought fit.

It happened, I was going to say unluckily, but I should rather say most luckily, for *Trim*, for he was the only gainer by it, that a quarrel, about some six or eight weeks after this, broke out betwixt the late parson of the parish and *John* the clerk. Somebody (and it was thought to be nobody but *Trim*) had put it into the parson's head, "that *John's* desk in the church was at the least four inches higher than it should be—that the thing gave offence, and was indecorous, inasmuch as it approached too near upon a level with the parson's desk itself."—This hardship the parson complained of loudly, and told *John*, one-day after prayers, "he could bear it no longer—and would have it altered, and brought down as it should be." *John* made no other reply, but "that the desk was not of his raising:—that 'twas not one hair-breadth higher than he found it—and that as he found it, so he would leave it.—In short, he would neither make an encroachment, neither would he suffer one."—The late parson might have his virtues, but the leading part of his character was not *humility*—so that *John's* stiffness in this point was not likely to reconcile matters.—This was *Trim's* harvest.

After a friendly hint to *John* to stand his ground, away hies *Trim* to make his market at the vicarage.—What passed there I will not say, intending not to be uncharitable; so shall content myself with only guessing at it from the sudden change that appeared in *Trim's* dress for the better—for he had left his old ragged coat, hat, and wig, in the stable, and was come forth strutting across the church yard, yclad in a good charitable cast coat, large hat, and wig,

wig, which the parson had just given him.—Ho ! ho ! hollo ! *John*, cries *Trim*, in an insolent bravo, as loud as ever he could bawl—see here, my lad, how fine I am !—The more shame for you, answered *John* seriously—Do you think, *Trim*, says he, such finery, gained by such services, becomes you, or can wear well ?—Fy upon it, *Trim*, I could not have expected this from you, considering what friendship you pretended, and how kind I have ever been to you—how many shillings, and sixpences, I have generously lent you in your distresses.—Nay, it was but the other day that I promised you these black plush breeches I have on.—Rot your breeches, quoth *Trim* (for *Trim*'s brain was half turn'd with his new finery) rot your breeches, says he—I would not take them up were they laid at my door—give them, and be d—d to you, to whom you like—I would have you to know I can have a better pair of the parson's any day in the week — *John* told him plainly, as his word had once passed him, he had a spirit above taking advantage of his insolence in giving them away to another—but, to tell him his mind freely, he thought he had got so many favours of that kind, and was so likely to get many more for the same services, of the parson, that he had better give up the breeches, with good nature, to some one who would be more thankful for them.

Here *John* mentioned *Mark Slender* (who it seems the day before had asked *John* for them) not knowing they were under promise to *Trim*—"Come, "*Trim*, says he, let poor *Mark* have them—you "*know* he has not a pair to his a—: besides, you "*see* he is just of my size, and they will fit to a T; "*whereas* if I give em to you, look ye, they are "*not* worth much ; and besides, you could not get "*your* backside into them, if you had them, with- "*out* tearing them all to pieces."—Every tittle of this was most undoubtedly true ; for *Trim*, you must know, by foul feeding, and playing the good-fellow

fellow at the parson's, was grown somewhat gross about the lower parts, *if not higher*; so that, as all *John* said upon the occasion was fact, *Trim*, with much ado, and after a hundred hums and hahs, at last, out of mere compassion to *Mark*, *signs, seals, and delivers up* ALL RIGHT, INTEREST, AND PRETENSIONS WHATSOEVER IN AND TO THE SAID BREECHES, THEREBY BINDING HIS HEIRS, EXECUTORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND ASSIGNS, NEVER MORE TO CALL THE SAID CLAIM IN QUESTION.—All this renunciation was set forth, in an ample manner, to be in pure pity to *Mark's* nakedness—but the secret was, *Trim* had an eye to, and firmly expected, in his own mind, the great green pulpit-cloth, and old velvet cushion, which were that very year to be taken down—which, by-the-bye, could he have wheedled *John* a second time, as he had hoped, would have made up the loss of the breeches seven-fold.

Now, you must know, this pulpit-cloth and cushion were not in *John's* gift, but in the churchwardens, &c. However, as I said above, that *John* was a leading man in the parish, *Trim* knew he could help him to 'em if he would—but *John* had got a surfeit of him—so, when the pulpit-cloth, &c. were taken down, they were immediately given (*John* having a great say in it) to *William Doe*, who understood very well what use to make of them.

As for the old breeches, poor *Mark* lived to wear them but a short time, and they got into the possession of *Lorry Slim*; an unlucky wight, by whom they are still worn—in truth, as you will guess, they are very thin by this time.

But *Lorry* has a light heart, and what recommends them to him, is this, that, as thin as they are, he knows that *Trim*, let him say what he will to the contrary, still envies the possessor of them, and, with all his pride, would be very glad to wear them after him.

G c

Upon

Upon this footing have these affairs slept quietly for near ten years—and would have slept for ever, but for the unlucky kicking bout, which, as I said, has ripped this squabble up afresh; so that it was no longer ago than last week, that *Trim* met and insulted *John* in the public town-way before a hundred people—tax'd him with the promise of the old cast pair of black breeches, notwithstanding *Trim*'s solemn renunciation—twitted him with the pulpit-cloth and velvet cushion—as good as told him he was ignorant of the common duties of his clerkship; adding, very insolently, that he knew not so much as to give out a common psalm in tune.

John contented himself by giving a plain answer to every article that *Trim* had laid to his charge, and appealed to his neighbours, who remembered the whole affair—and, as he knew there was never any thing to be got by wrestling with a chimney-sweeper, he was going to take his leave of *Trim* for ever. But hold—the mob by this time had got round them, and their high mightinesses insisted upon having *Trim* tried upon the spot.

Trim was accordingly tried, and, after a full hearing, was convicted a second time, and handled more roughly by one or more of them than even at the parson's.—

Trim, says one, are you not ashamed of yourself to make all this rout and disturbance in the town, and set neighbours together by the ears, about an old—worn—out—pair of cast—breeches not worth half a crown? Is there a cast coat, or a place in the whole town, that will bring you in a shilling, but what you have snapped up like a greedy hound as you are.—

In the first place, are you not sexton and dog-whipper, worth three pounds a-year? Then you begged the church-wardens to let your wife have
the

the washing and darning of the church-linen, which brings you in thirteen shillings and fourpence; then you have six shillings and eightpence for oiling and winding up the clock, both paid you at Easter—the pounder's place, which is worth forty shillings a-year, you have got that too—you are the bailiff, which the late parson got you, which brings you in forty shillings more.

Besides all this, you have six pounds a-year, paid you quarterly, for being mole-catcher to the parish. Aye, says the luckless wight above mentioned, (who was standing close by him with the plush breeches on), "you are not only mole-catcher, *Trim*, but you catch *STRAY CONIES* too in the dark, and you pretend a licence for it, which, I trow, will be looked into at the next quarter-sessions." I maintain it, I have a licence, says *Trim*, blushing as red as scarlet—I have a licence, and, as I farm a warren in the next parish, I will catch conies every hour of the night. *You catch conies!* says a toothless old woman just passing by.

This set the mob a laughing, and sent every man home in perfect good humour, except *Trim*, who waddled very slowly off with that kind of inflexible gravity only to be equalled by one animal in the creation, and surpassed by none.

I am,

Sir, yours, &c. &c.

POSTSCRIPT.

I Have broke open my letter to inform you, that I missed the opportunity of sending it by the messenger, who I expected would have called upon me in his return thro' this village to York; so it has lain a-week or ten days by me—I am not sorry
for

for the disappointment, because something has since happened, in continuation of this affair, which I am thereby enabled to transmit to you all under one trouble.

When I finished the above account, I thought (as did every soul in the parish) *Trim* had met with so thorough a rebuff from *John* the parish-clerk, and the town's folks, who all took against him, that *Trim* would be glad to be quiet, and let the matter rest.

But, it seems, it is not half an hour ago since *Trim* sallied forth again, and, having borrowed a sow-gelder's horn, with hard blowing he got the whole town round him, and endeavoured to raise a disturbance, and fight the whole battle over again—alleg'd that he had been used in the last fray worse than a dog, not by *John* the parish-clerk, for I should not, quoth *Trim*, have valued him a rush single hands—but all the town sided with him, and twelve men in buckram set upon me, all at once, and kept me in play at sword's point for three hours together.

Besides, quoth *Trim*, there were two misbegotten knaves in *Kendal green*, who lay all the while in ambush in *John's* own house, and they all sixteen came upon my back, and let drive at me all together—a plague, says *Trim*, of all cowards.

Trim repeated this story above a dozen times, which made some of the neighbours pity him, thinking the poor fellow crack-brain'd, and that he actually believed what he said.

After this *Trim* dropped the affair of the breeches, and began a fresh dispute about the reading desk, which I told you had occasioned some small dispute between the late parson and *John*, some years ago.—This reading desk, as you will observe,

serve, was but an episode wove into the main story by-the-bye, for the main affair was *the battle of the breeches and the great coat*.

However, *Trim* being at last driven out of these two citadels—he has seized hold, in his retreat, of this reading desk, with a view, as it seems, to take shelter behind it.

I cannot say but the man has fought it out obstinately enough, and, had his cause been good, I should have really pitied him. For, when he was driven out of the *great watch-coat*, you see he did not run away; no, — he retreated behind the breeches, and, when he could make nothing of it behind the breeches, he got behind the reading desk. To what other hold *Trim* will next retreat, the politicians of this village are not agreed. Some think his next move will be towards the rear of the parson's boot; but, as it is thought he cannot make a long stand there, others are of opinion, that *Trim* will once more in his life get hold of the parson's horse, and charge upon him, or perhaps behind him: but, as the horse is not easy to be caught, the more general opinion is, that, when he is driven out of the reading desk, he will make his last retreat in such a manner, as, if possible, to gain the *close-stool*, and defend himself behind it to the very last drop.

If *Trim* should make this movement, by my advice, he should be left, besides his citadel, in full possession of the field of battle, where 'tis certain he will keep every body a league off, and may hop by himself till he is weary. Besides, as *Trim* seems bent upon *purging* himself, and may have abundance of foul-humours to work off, I think he cannot be better placed.

But this is all matter of speculation—Let me carry you back to matter of fact, and tell you what kind of stand *Trim* has actually made behind the said desk: “Neighbours and townsmen all, I will
“be

be sworn before my Lord Mayor, that *John* and his nineteen men in *buckram* have abused me worse than a dog ; for they told you that I play'd fast and go loose with the *late* parson and him in that old dispute of theirs about the *reading desk*, and that I made matters worse between them, and not better."

Of this charge *Trim* declared he was as innocent as the child that was unborn—that he would be book-sworn he had no hand in it.

He produced a strong witness, and moreover insinuated, that *John* himself, instead of being angry for what he had done in it, had actually thanked him—Aye, *Trim*, says the wight in the pluth breeches, but that was, *Trim*, the day before *John* found thee out. Besides, *Trim*, there is nothing in that ; for the very year that you was made town's pounder, thou knowest well, that I both thanked thee myself, and moreover gave thee a good warm supper for turning *John Lund's* cows and horses out of my hard corn close, which, if thou hadst not done, (as thou told'st me), I should have lost my whole crop ; whereas *John Lund* and *Thomas Patt*, who are both here to testify, and are both willing to take their oaths on't, that thou thyself was the very man who set the gate open—and after all, it was not thee, *Trim*, 'twas the blacksmith's poor lad who turned them out—so that a man may be thanked and rewarded too for a good turn which he never did, nor ever did intend.

Trim could not sustain this unexpected stroke—so *Trim* marched off the field without colours flying, or his horn sounding, or any other ensigns of honour whatever.—Whether after this *Trim* intends to rally a second time—or whether he may not take it into his head to claim the victory—none but *Trim* himself can inform you.

20 JU 66
However, the general opinion upon the whole is this, that, in three several pitch'd battles, *Trim* has been so trimm'd as never disastrous hero was trimm'd before.

F I N I S.

and
orfe
faft
old
t I
r."

ent
be

in-
gry
ted
uth
bn
in
n's
ed
rm
les
dft
oft
as
th
elf
nd
k-
a
od

g.
o-
n-
ay
ne

is
as
2